

IF THERE WERE
NO NAVIES !

BY
ARCHIBALD HURD



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1916.

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IF THERE WERE NO NAVIES!

“WHAT a blessing it would be if there were no costly fleets to be maintained by the nations, great and small! Consider the amount of solid good which could be achieved if the vast sum of £200,000,000,* which the navies cost each year, could be set free to be spent on social reform, or on education, or in bringing the sick back to life, or in elevating the masses!” That is the cry which was frequently heard right down to the day when Armageddon occurred. In May, 1914, the National Peace Council (London) published a pamphlet entitled “The War Traders,” and the author, Mr. George Herbert Perris, writing no doubt from sincere conviction, summed up his conclusions by stating that “of actual war, we may say, as of famine, cholera and plague, that throughout the West, the worst hour is passed. The milder, yet more widespread and obstinate, form of the

* On the eve of the Great War £200,000,000 were being devoted each year to the upkeep of navies.

same disease called the Armed Peace remains. But the challenge has gone out, and is echoed in the Senate and the market-place. On the one hand are ranged superstitious fear and brazen greed; on the other, all the best intelligence and conscience of the age. The extraordinary contradiction which still vitiates much of our effort, multiplying at once warships and arbitration treaties, regiments and universities, rescuing the millions from one serfdom only to cast them into another, cannot much longer continue. The great hope of the future lies in the fact that this contradiction is now realised by most intelligent men."

The millenium dawned in the fair spring months of 1914, when preparations were well advanced for the celebration of the Treaty of Ghent; in August the most devastating war known in the world's history broke out, because Germany judged that "The Day" had come. She was prepared, with trained men in millions and vast accumulated stores of munitions; her victims—France, Russia and Britain—were unprepared, as the record of events has shown. The military forces of the Allies were certainly

in no condition to throw back the Teutonic armies. Without underestimating the splendid valour which the armies in the field have exhibited, it is apparent that the one asset which the Entente Powers possessed, on which they could rely in those early days to save them from overwhelming defeat, was the British Fleet. That great engine was ready, and it robbed Germany of the swift, easy and cheap victory on which she had counted. The British Fleet has played a great part in the war. It has proved a "sure shield," not only to the British peoples throughout the world, but to the Allies also. It has been not merely a screen, but a source of strength, because it has enabled them to draw fresh strength from overseas. Sea power has been translated into military, financial and economic power.

Let a secret be revealed! In the last few days of July, 1914, the German military caste professed to consider that naval power was of small importance; Grand Admiral von Tirpitz appealed to the Kaiser for a few days delay, in order that he might complete his naval preparations and at least get out on the high seas all

the commerce destroyers which, at a few hours' notice, could be armed and despatched on the trade routes. That request was refused. The first line of defence of Germany, he was reminded, was her "invincible Army," and she must strike when it had the best hope of success; and, therefore, war must be entered upon without delay. As the months passed, the German and Austrian armies, with the aid of armaments unprecedented in their character and created in secrecy in the years of peace, penetrated deep into Belgium, France and Russia, laying waste vast regions and enslaving the local populations; and then Servia and Montenegro were overrun and further horrors were enacted.

Every success of the Central Powers fell short of victory. At last, the Germans realised that their early hopes were dead, and other men began to talk of "a stalemate." The tendency was—if it be not even now in many quarters—to ignore the influence of sea power. The Germans, defeated at sea and robbed of their trade and colonies, took advantage of this attitude of mind, suggesting that navies were an anacronism

as employed by Great Britain and her partners, and that no Power, or group of Powers, should have the right to deny the freedom of German, Austrian and neutral merchantmen to go where they liked. The present advocates of an entirely new doctrine of "the freedom of the seas" have recognised for many months past, as many students of the war have not, that naval power controls land power, and that the nations which can take full advantage of the seas for the carriage of munitions and food, while denying their use to their enemies, are sure to win. Germans have been reminded by the course of events of the words of Mahan, written of the Battle of Trafalgar:—"Amid all the pomp and circumstances of the war, which for ten years to come desolated the continent, amid all the tramping to and fro over Europe of the French armies and their auxiliary legions, there went on unceasingly the noiseless pressure upon the vitals of France—that compulsion, whose silence, when once noted, becomes to the observer the most striking and awful mark of the working of Sea Power." The hopes of the Central Powers of a speedy victory on land were not realised, and

gradually, as the weeks stretched into months, the Germans, from the Kaiser and the Imperial Chancellor downwards, recalled the influence which sea-power had exercised on the world's history. The words, "the sea controls the land," or some such phrase, rang in their ears, and they determined that the only hope of safety lay in denouncing "the ban of sea tyranny" which it was claimed that the British Fleet, in association with the navies of France, Italy, Russia and Japan, was imposing on Central Powers.

If neutrals turned a willing ear to Germany's arguments, and decided that navies should be shorn of their belligerent rights, what would be the result?

The seas are no defence in themselves; they constitute a peril unless they are held by force, as the Allied Fleets hold them to-day. A man in the 20th-century can walk no faster than Adam walked in the Garden of Eden—say, at four miles an hour. He cannot walk over the sea. He can, however, travel by sea, in a ship, at about thirty miles an hour. The movement of an army by land is desperately slow, and it cannot advance beyond the sea line; the movement

of an army by sea, in transports, is remarkably swift, as the Americans proved during the Spanish War, as Japan showed in the Far East, as the Allies have revealed since the present hostilities opened, and as the Kaiser knows very well. A sea frontier in imaginable circumstances may be more dangerous than a land frontier. It is more easy to surprise a nation by moving an army by sea than by land. It is the navies which float on the seas which transform those seas into means of defence. As long ago as the eighth century, when Offa, King of Mercia, lay dying, and his thoughts turned to the averted peril of the invasion of his island kingdom by Charlemagne, he "bequeathed to England (according to the Saxon Chronicle) this useful lesson, that he who will be secure on land must be supreme at sea."

If throughout the centuries the English people had not acted on Offa's principle, England to-day would be a dependency of one of the great Continental Powers—perhaps even of Germany—and probably from Hudson Bay down to Cape Horn the inhabitants of the American Continent would be paying tribute to some supreme

military Power. Time and again, sea power has intervened to save the civilised world from the despotic dominion of some great military genius; Charlemagne, Charles V., Philip II. of Spain, Louis XIV. of France, and Napoleon were, each in turn, defeated by sea power, as William II. of Germany will be defeated by the same weapon.

There are only two Powers which, in normal circumstances, are not "nations in arms"; Great Britain is one and the United States, with its extended coastlines and vast and unwarlike population, is the other. A large body of German officers have always believed in the possibility of invading the British Isles, once the British Fleet was decoyed away on some fool's errand. What of America? A member of the German General Staff, General von Edelsheim, reminded his fellow countrymen a few years ago, in a pamphlet entitled "Operationen über See," that "Germany is the only Great Power which is able to tackle the United States single handed." Why? The answer is simple—*Germany is the one Great Power, possessing a vast army, a great war fleet—superior in fact to that*

of the United States—and a commercial fleet able to furnish transports.

Let the United States Navy be robbed of any of its belligerent rights and what influence could it exert against an enemy? According to the Germans, it ought not to be permitted to interfere with an enemy's efforts to obtain raw materials with which to strengthen his army or food with which to feed it. If it was reduced to a purely defensive role, would it be worth the money it costs? Would it not in those circumstances be neglected? Could it in its weakness prevent an enemy effecting a landing, by surprise, on one or more parts of the coast and thus invading the country? The Germans, strategically at a disadvantage in a geographical sense, believe that if they can prevail on the nations to limit the use of sea power, they can secure world dominion for their armies; there is no country which they could not invade from the sea—England, France, Russia, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Spain among the European Powers, and on the other side of the Atlantic the American Republics. Their propaganda against "navalism" is intended to facilitate oversea

expeditions. Their fleet having failed to place "the trident in our fist," let navies be shorn of their value, and then the peoples of the world will neglect them and there will be no obstacle to the progress of welt politik. That is their thought.

The German officer to whom reference has been made was convinced that once Germany could get her army afloat, she could defeat the United States. His arguments are full of interest in the light of the German campaign against "navalism," remembering that the main defence of the United States is, and must be, by sea :—

"If Germany begins preparing a fleet of transports and troops for landing purposes at the moment when the battle fleet steams out of our harbours, we may conclude that operations on American soil can begin after about four weeks, and it cannot be doubted that the United States will not be able to oppose to us within that time an army equivalent to our own. . . .

"As an operation by surprise against America is impossible, on account of the length of time during which the transports are

on the way, only the landing can be affected by surprise. Nevertheless, stress must be laid on the fact that the rapidity of the invasion will considerably facilitate victory against the United States, owing to the absence of methodical preparation for mobilisation, owing to the inexperience of the personnel, and owing to the weakness of the regular army."

The writer then discussed the task which the invading armies could achieve, and he continued in these words :—

" Therefore the task of the fleet would be to undertake a series of large landing operations, through which we are able to take several of these important and wealthy towns within a brief space of time. By interrupting their communications, by destroying all buildings serving the State, commerce, and the defence, by taking away all material for war and transport, and lastly, by levying heavy contributions, we should be able to inflict damage on the United States.

" For such enterprise a smaller military force will suffice. Nevertheless, the American

defence will find it difficult to undertake a successful enterprise against that kind of warfare. Though an extremely well-developed railway system enables them to concentrate troops within a short time on the different points of the coast, the concentration of the troops, and the time which is lost until it is recognised which of the many threatened points of landing will really be utilised will, as a rule, make it possible for the army of invasion to carry out its operation with success under the co-operation of the fleet at the point chosen. The corps landed can either take the offensive against gathering hostile forces or withdraw to the transports in order to land at another place.

“ It should be pointed out that Germany is the only Great Power which is able to tackle the United States single-handed.”*

It is impossible to exaggerate the danger in which the United States, with one of the smallest armies in the world, would stand, if the American Navy were to be either robbed of its power by international agreement or neglected

* “ Modern Germany ” (London : Methuen & Co.).

owing to apathy on the part of the American people. The strategic position of the United States is very similar to that of the United Kingdom. As long as the United States possesses an adequate fleet, armed with all the traditional privileges of naval power, the Republic enjoys a measure of security possessed by few other Powers of the world, and a weapon of defence which no nation will desire to meet. But once that guarantee is weakened, there are few countries which could be more easily defeated by Germany with her millions of soldiers and her fine transports. Germany is organised for war—as the United States, like the United Kingdom and the whole British Empire, is organised for peace; and once the seas are free to the Germans, all the non-militarist nations will be in the gravest peril. It is difficult to see how Americans, in particular, could save themselves; if every man were drilled to arms, it is doubtful if the Republic, with long coast lines on the Atlantic and Pacific, could be freed from the imminent risk of invasion, followed by all the horrors of war.

Ratzel reminded the German people some

years ago, that "the modern tendency is for all great Powers to be sea-Powers as well as land-Powers," and, declaring that "the old sharp contrast between sea-Powers and land-Powers is gone," he prophesied that "the nineteenth century wars which were decided exclusively by land, will soon be looked back upon with wonder." In one of the volumes of "Nauticus," a publication under the auspices of the Imperial German Government, a writer even went to the length of saying that "the battles of the future will be by sea," and the Kaiser remarked that "our future lies on the sea." In other words, the more the Emperor and his advisers studied the wars of 1864, 1866 and 1870, the more they were driven to the conclusion that Germany required a great Navy in order to obtain length of reach for her vast Army. "As my grandfather did for his land Army," Wilhelm II. stated on January 1, 1900, at the celebrations in Berlin on the opening of the new century, "so will I for my Navy in the same manner, without faltering, carry through the work of reorganisation, so that it may be able to stand with equal authority at the side of my combative forces on

land, and that by its means the German Empire may be in a position to win abroad the place it has not yet attained." What Germany meant to achieve by the use of her Army and Navy was no secret to the German people. "Wherever the German eagle has thrust his talons into a country," the Emperor told them, "that country is German, and will remain German."

Let there be no mistake. Because in the present war, Germany has met with disappointments, and sees, owing in the main to superior sea power being arrayed against her, the hour of defeat approaching, she will not readily abandon her militarism. As she had her eye fixed on the American Continent in the years preceding the opening of hostilities in Europe, so her jealous gaze will turn in the same direction when the existing conflict is over. She want Colonies—German through and through. The Monroe doctrine bars her way. It has persisted in spite of her secret efforts to undermine it. "What at the moment when the Monroe doctrine was proclaimed," Admiral Mahan once asked, "insured beyond peradventure that immunity from foreign oppression of the Spanish-American

colonies in their struggle for independence?" "The command of the sea by Great Britain," he replied, "backed by the feeble navy but imposing strategic position of the United States. . . ." At any time during the next ten or twenty years, how can the United States defend the Monroe doctrine against a great naval and military Power such as Germany? In the opinion of Germans, drawing their inspiration from the highest quarters, "the interference of the States with other continents which has actually taken place, should make an end of the doctrine (Nauticus), while Sering in his *Handels und Macht politik*, has stated that "the old Monroe doctrine, the reverse of which was non-interference outside America (c.f. Cuba and the Philippines) is now abandoned, and replaced by the formula 'America for the Americans'—*i.e.*, all North, Central and South America for the United States."

Germans object as strongly to the new as to the old formula; they have no respect for the Monroe doctrine, as the pamphlets of the Pan German Union have revealed, and no fear of the Army of the United States. They regard the Monroe

Doctrine as representing an obnoxious principle, which, unless it is adequately defended by force, is of no importance. The influence which in the past has restrained them more than any other has been Britain's interest, by reason of her settlement of Canada, her trade with the other American States, and her political sympathies with the United States, in preserving the American Continent from European interference. If it be suggested that the British Fleet, for the past half century in particular, has been a real bulwark to the United States, can the statement be denied by those who have studied the development of world politics? Are not both countries, as well as many others—France, Italy and Russia—dependent upon sea power for salvation? Are they not doomed if their fleets are shackled as Germany would have been shackled? Could not their armies be turned on the flank or rear? Does not any limitation of sea power, mean an exaggeration of land power, seeing that the seas in themselves are not only no defence, but a peril if they cannot be held in force?

On the eve of the present war, many publicists in the United Kingdom urged that the reign of

law and order had begun, that the Hague Conferences had so limited military power, that the maritime nations should agree to a restriction of naval power. Lord Loreburn, the British Ex-Lord Chancellor, in advocating the abolition of the right of capture of private property at sea, remarked in a little book on that subject, published in the spring of 1913, that "life and property at sea should be protected by safeguards similar to those by which they are safeguarded on land in the Hague Convention." Of what advantage has the Hague Convention been to the peoples of Belgium, France, Poland, Servia and Montenegro? Of what advantage would it be if Britain or the United States or other country were invaded by German troops? The truth is that Germany has in the course of this war murdered and left dead every instrument which was framed by the nations in order to rob war of some of its horrors. She believes in making war by every means, however barbaric, as terrifying, agonising and inhumane as it can be made, because she thinks herself to be the only nation which will go beyond the limits of civilisation and be thus able to win. That

doctrine has been declared to the world in words and in acts.

It may be recalled in this connection, even at the risk of repetition of a passage familiar to many readers, that less than two years before the opening of the present conflict, Dr. Georg Schramm, First Councillor of the Imperial Navy Department, published a book in which he declared that the conduct of war by sea must be conducted with the same ruthlessness as by land :—

“ As warfare takes place in the country of one of the antagonists, all military measures naturally affect the inhabitants in general. The struggle for possession of towns and villages necessarily leads to the destruction of peaceful private property, and the conduct of war inflicts suffering of every kind upon the civil population. The occupation of hostile territory and the requisitions and contributions exacted from the peaceful population, give to the victor the most powerful means for hurting his opponent, and furnish the most efficient supplement of military successes.

“ Notwithstanding the progress of the laws

of war, war affects not only the State in abstract, but both the hostile and the peaceful inhabitants of the opponent State, who suffer in life and property. The question whether the peaceful inhabitants ought to suffer from warfare on land need not be discussed from the point of view of abstract justice. The fact is decisive that by these measures the power of resistance of the enemy nation and his economic strength are weakened. Hence, requisitions and contributions are true means of warfare side by side with military action.

“ In warfare on sea, as in warfare on land, the direct and indirect means go hand-in-hand. The fact that in naval warfare other indirect means are employed than in warfare by land, makes no difference. Warfare on sea and on land pursues the identical object, and it endeavours to achieve these by direct and indirect means. *The indirect means of naval warfare are directed against the economic foundations of the hostile State. They aim at making the inhabitants themselves suffer from the consequences of war, breaking the power of resistance of the hostile State, and thus*

accelerating the conclusion of peace. The indirect means of naval warfare consist in the trade and cruiser war, carried on by seizing hostile property on sea, blockading the enemy's coasts and harbours, and cutting off the supply of those commodities which strengthen the enemy's power of resistance. . . ."

Let there be no mistake. Naval power is the one "sure shield" of France, Italy, Russia, the United States, and other nations with long and exposed coastlines, as of the British Empire. Every limitation of its influence must result in strengthening the power of action of a great militarist nation such as Germany. Sea Power is the one only effective check on German militarism. The blockade is the instrument Germany fears. Without the use of the seas, she cannot maintain her army. There is nothing which the seas yield which cannot be turned to the use of armies—whether it be metal, fat, hides, sugar or grain, and hence the value of the power of blockade of the British Fleet exercised against Germany. There is no barrier to the oversea activity of these same armies except ships of war. It has sometimes been said

that the "British Empire floats on the British Navy." The war now in progress has convinced the world that the sea controls the land, and that fleets are the effective checks against military aggression.

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